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5th SF
Outline Hist

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Outline History of the 5th SF Gp (Abn)

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Participation in the CIDG Program 1961-1970

I PREFACE

1. (C) The purpose of this outline history and supporting annexes is to briefly analyze the role of USASF participation in the CIDG program. Essential to this analysis is an examination of the role of the USASF-advised CIDG program within the overall Vietnamese conflict.
2. (C) Certain problems have resulted in limitations being placed upon the scope and documentation of this history and supporting annexes. They are: 1. the high classification of certain operations and projects involving USASF personnel, and 2. the non-availability in Vietnam of source documents and materials relevant to the history. During the early years of USASF involvement in the CIDG program, few records were kept because few were required by higher echelons. Additionally records which were made in the early years, 1961-64 have long since been retired to WNRC. Non-availability of records is also a limiting factor for the period 1964-1968. In fact, the period for which substantial source documents and materials remain in Vietnam is the period 1969-1970. Therefore, this outline history and annexes deal mainly with the latter years of the CIDG program.
3. (C) The outline history, itself is general in its scope and quite limited in its documentation, owing to the reasons previously explained. The outline is based upon three excellent government sponsored studies, some official and non-official DA and 5th SF Gp (Abn) documents, numerous taped interviews and questionnaires and personnel conversations which the author had with participants. The outline is useful since it deals with major trends and events and puts them into the perspective of the larger Allied effort in South Vietnam. The annexes to the outline history are narratives written by USASF personnel, about subordinate C and separate B detachments as well as Group Headquarters' staff sections. The annexes examine in greater detail than the outline, trends and events which were significant to the subordinate detachments or Headquarters staff activity.
4. (C) The bibliography contains source materials on hand at HQ, 5th SF Gp (abn) at the time during which this outline history was written. To aid future historians, a disposition remark has been made for each document.

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II SUMMARY

1. (U) Prior to 1961 USASF participation in the Vietnamese counter-insurgency was limited to the temporary Mobile Training Teams dispatched from Okinawa to assist in the training of ARVN units.
2. (U) In November of 1961, the Combined Studies Division (CSD) of the US Operations Mission initiated a project among the Rhade tribesmen of BUON ENAO village in MR 2. By arming and training these Montagnards, together with developing and supporting socio-economic projects of benefit to the tribesmen, it was hoped that they would resist VC proselyting activities. VNSF and USASF personnel were tasked with command and training missions, while logistical support was provided through the USASF. The program was well received by the Rhade tribesmen and grew rapidly from one village in November 1961 to over 200 villages by November 1962.
3. (U) During the period of the Buon Enao experiment with the Rhade, a number of other programs were initiated by the CSD in an effort to extend governmental control over areas either lost to the GVN, or where control was strongly contested. The purpose of these other programs was to develop paramilitary forces, among ethnic and religious minority groups, which could assist the counter-insurgency forces of the GVN. These paramilitary support activities together with the Area Development Centers which extended out of Buon Enao in the spring of 1962 into the Montagnard tribal regions and elsewhere came to be officially designated as the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) Program.
4. (U) In June of 1962 the Defense Dept decided to transfer operational responsibility for the CIDG program from CSD to the US Army. A one year phase-in period completed the transfer in July 1963.
5. (U) By February 1963 HQ, USASF (P) V had assumed operational responsibility for the CIDG program in all four Corps Tactical Zones.
6. (U) The Border Surveillance (BS) Program, generated by the need for intelligence of increasing enemy troop and supply infiltration into RVN, became part of the CIDG program in Nov 63.
7. (U) On 26 October 1963, USASF in Vietnam were assigned (as an additional mission) responsibility for the Border Surveillance Program. Started in June 1962, under the operational control of CSD, units in this program were formerly called "Trailwatchers" and later, "Mountain Scouts". Their general mission was to provide a reconnaissance and intelligence screen along the Laotian and Cambodian borders. As with the interior CIDG sites the Border Surveillance concept called for eventual integration into the Strategic Hamlet Program and absorption of Strike Forces into RVNAF. Starting with 4 BS sites in November, 1963 the number was increased to 18 in the spring of 1964 - on half the total CIDG sites staffed by USASF.
8. (U) During July 1963, 211 villages of the Buon Enao complex were turned over to Provincial control. Due to its relationship with the GVN Strategic Hamlet

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Program, it has been a characteristic of the CIDG program to phase itself out in an area which has become sufficiently free of VC influence. This enables the province chief to assume responsibility for the trained irregulars and fortified camps.

9. (U) In May, 1964 operational control over USASF "A" detachments was assigned to the Senior Advisor in each Corps Tactical Zone. This control was exercised through the USASF "B" detachments then assigned at corps level. This new command relationship enabled the Corps commander to readily integrate CIDG operations. The highly efficient VNSF/USASF intelligence effort, based upon the participation of persons indigenous to the operational area of the CIDG camp, was to prove invaluable to the Corps commanders. Many of the more productive ARVN and US operations after 1963 began as a result of CIDG contacts or intelligence.

10. (U) 1965 was the year that marked the beginning of the US conventional unit build-up in RVN. This build-up was largely responsible for a noticeable shift in priorities in CIDG operations. The new US units, unfamiliar with the operational environment of Vietnam came, out of necessity, to depend on the area knowledge and intelligence capabilities of the USASF advised CIDG program. This in turn, caused the VNSF/USASF to devote increasing efforts towards the military aspects of their mission, at the expense of the "Area Development" mission. Thus it came to be that the main contribution of the USASF/VNSF/CIDG toward defeating VC and Main Force units lay not in attempting to engage and defeat them, but in finding them for conventional forces. The missions as assigned in 1965 remained basically unchanged through 1969.

11. (U) It was also in 1964, that the 5th SF Gp (Abn) deployed to RVN to assume command and staff supervision over the USASF detachments operating there, establishing "C" teams in each Corps area to act as command control, administrative and logistical headquarters.

12. (C) The MIKE FORCES were organized in 1964 under unilateral USASF command and were brought under joint USASF/VNSF command in December 1966. Strength, as of mid 1967 was 19 companies. Mobile Guerilla Forces were created in 1966 for extended reconnaissance operations. In 1967 both were referred to and employed as MIKE FORCES. ✓

13. (U) As the demands for support by US combat units increased, so too did requirements relating to the GVN pacification program. In 1965 MACV assigned a subsector advisory mission, co-equal with the CIDG advisory mission, to A detachments situated near district capitols. Some detachments were even assigned to subsectors without a co-equal CIDG mission. In certain provinces in III and IV CTZ, the control B detachments were assigned the co-equal advisory mission. The mission of an A or B detachment commander, in this role, was to advise and assist the district or province chief in the training and employment of his regional and popular forces.

14. (U) In 1966, at the direction of COMUSMACV, 5th SF Gp (Abn) staffed and provided facilities for a Long Range Reconnaissance school designated the MACV Recondo School. The school was highly successful at training selected US and

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FWMAF personnel in the techniques of patrolling, intelligence collection and exploitation, and small unit tactics.

15. (U) The TET offensive which began in January of 1968 saw the wide employment of CIDG troops in the conventional mode. Although untrained in the tactics of operations in built up areas the CIDG proved to be very adaptable to this form of warfare and significantly contributed to the success of the Allied post TET counteroffensive.

16. (U) From 1964 to the present time, the training, advisory, and support missions of USASF in Vietnam has contributed to the continual effectiveness of the VNSF commanded CIDG program. Often acting in support roles to large US and ARVN conventional units the soldiers of the CIDG program have demonstrated military capabilities that could have scarcely been predicted in the early developmental phases of the Area Development Center. The program, by recruiting many members of ethnic minority groups, led to the partial absorption of several hitherto dissident groups, into the GVN body politic. This has increased the stability and influence of the GVN throughout Vietnam and represented a marked increase in the human resources available to the GVN for the prosecution of the present conflict.

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III THE FORMATIVE YEARS

1. The Doctrinal Framework

a. (U) (Special Forces doctrine governing its primary mission, Unconventional Warfare developed following the Second World War.) The doctrine was and is still argued by many theorists and professional soldiers. In as much as soldiers acting in semi-autonomous units tend to perform their tasks according to an understanding of their purposes, it is important to appreciate the ideas which shaped that understanding. In the instance of Vietnam, early Special Forces doctrine has exerted both obvious and subtle influences.

b. (U) The term Unconventional Warfare has come to mean different things to different people. Some contend that it is a type of warfare in the sense that Armored warfare is a type of warfare. Others contend that it and its practitioners comprise a political/military force autonomous of, though, at times, complementary to land armies. Though the United States Army resolved the official doctrinal problem in favor of the latter interpretation, it was and still is a controversial topic among Special Forces and non-Special Forces soldiers.

c. (U) The second World War saw widespread use of partisans, irregulars, guerrillas and commandos. They were used strategically as well as tactically for both political and military gain. They were inexpensive to support while being generally quite expensive to defeat. Statesmen and soldiers saw the advantage in using such groups and so the search for a political-military framework began. But it was a difficult search, since there was little common ground among the various partisans, irregulars, guerrillas and commandos except their methods of operating, i.e. guerrilla operations and political/psychological operations. Thus the very term Unconventional Warfare, is as clouded with ambiguities as the historical movements which gave shape to it. The ambiguities notwithstanding, Special Forces developed a method of operation largely patterned on past successful movements, born of the need to operate successfully in situations requiring military expertise and political finesse. Through the post-war era, experience complemented and contradicted the doctrine, but the methodology developed as the most essential feature of Special Forces - a feature that enabled USASF to successfully perform rapidly changing and continually expanding missions. Nevertheless, the strain of doctrine versus necessity had its effect on the Special Forces soldiers who shaped the CIDG program, and that is important. Important too, was the flexibility required of them by their own countrymen, the host country, and various ethnic and religious minority groups with whom they daily lived and worked.

2. The Vietnamese Special Forces

a. (C) The 1st VNSF was organized on 1 November 1952 from a group of hand picked officers and NCO's selected from different branches of the service. The unit was named the 1st Observation Group and was commanded by Captain Dam Von Quy. From 1957-1960 the main activities of the 1st Observation Groups was to conduct training and field training exercises. In late 1960 due to a requirement to re-

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organize in order to support an unconventional warfare mission, the 1st Observation Groups was reorganized and became one unit called the 77th Group. Its commander was Captain Tui The Minh, and later, Major Pham Van Phu. From 1960 to 1962, the 77th Group and attached units were utilized in various sensitive operations as well as the formation of the CIDG program. The 77th Groups operated under code names "42nd" in the Tay Ninh Area, "Eagle" in the Ca Mau Area, and "Coi Un" along the Tri Border Area. In early 1963 in order to support the modernization and improvement efforts of ARVN, a second group was organized with cadre supplied mostly from the 77th Group. This new unit was called the 31st Group, and was commanded by Captain Phom Duy Tat. Both the 77th and the 31st Group's were under the control of an agency of the presidential Palace, exploitation bureau called the Presidential Survey Office (PSO).

b. (C) On 15 January 1963 the VNSF was officially designated as an Armed Forces Unit. The VNSF High Command was organized as the command Headquarters replacing the exploitation Bureau and was also redesignated an Army unit. At this time support as well as technical units were also organized in order to support VNSF activities. During 1965 the border surveillance/infiltration interdiction program was developed. The two groups (the 31st and 77th) were transformed into 4 C-Detachments, one per military Region. From a group of 42 soldiers the VNSF cadre and irregular forces have grown to a sizeable force of 35,000 personnel representing the VNSF leadership throughout the Republic of Vietnam. The VNSF has been commanded by 7 commanders to date, (Dec 70); one of the later commanders, Brigadier General Pham Van PHU, was one of the original 42 soldiers of that first unit which grew into the present Vietnamese Special Forces.

3. The BOUN ENAO Project, Nov 61-Nov 62

a. (C) In 1960 the insurgency in South Vietnam reached sufficient intensity to alarm GVN and US leaders. It was apparent then, and even more so in 1961, that the communist insurgency was gaining momentum. Apparent too, was the effectiveness which the Communist had at infiltrating dissident and minority groups. "There were estimates that over 50% of the rural population in the highlands were VC sympathizers".¹ Communist efforts aimed at securing the support of the Montagnard minority, which numbered approximately one million, were feared all the more because of the strategic placement of many Montagnard tribes, such as the Bahnar and the Rhade. The long-standing animosity and mutual distrust which existed between the Vietnamese (lowlanders) and the Montagnards (highlanders) had prevented them from cooperating with one another for the purposes of defense or socio-economic improvement. Thus the areas in which the Montagnards lived had little if any GVN presence. The VC hoped to step into the vacuum and create bases, recruit and train insurgents and prosecute their war from the relative safety and isolation of the highland areas. It was part of the overall VC strategy, though by no means their main strategy.

b. (S) Recognizing the importance of finding ways to counter the VC insurgency, a Combined Studies Division (CSD) was organized under the United States Operations Mission in Vietnam. Although the CSD was concerned with the broad spectrum of counter insurgency requirements, particular attention was immedi-

1 RAC T-477, pg. 28

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ately placed upon developing ways to reverse the trend of subversion among minority groups. A pilot project was planned to be implemented with Rhade Tribesmen of Darlac Province. A CSD researcher who spent a year (1960-61) with the tribe, and a USASF medic, SFC CAMPBELL, from the 1st SF Gp., began negotiations with the BOUN ENAO village elders in October 1961. The two men, with GVN permission, offered military and socio-economic assistance to them, in exchange for village support of the GVN. The elders agreed to declare their support of the GVN and deny support to the VC. Toward that end, they constructed a fence around the village, dug bomb shelters to protect them from VC mortars, posted guards at the entrances to the village and began construction of a village dispensary.

c. (C) On 3 Dec 61, seven members of Detachment A-35 of the 1st Special Forces Group entered the village to begin a program of organizing, training and arming the villagers for self defense. In addition to training the villagers in self defense techniques, a medic-training program was initiated. A team member made the following observations concerning the appeal which the program had for the Rhade in and around BUON ENAO. "Within the first week they (Rhade Tribesmen) were lining up at the front gate to get into the program. This kicked off the recruiting program, and we didn't have to do much recruiting. The word went pretty fast from village to village."² The goals of the program were quite modest in the first months- the principal goal being to return trained and armed tribesmen to their respective villages under village leadership. It was hoped that these villagers would be able and willing to prevent the VC from acquiring or exerting influence over the villages and ultimately the entire tribal area. The program proved far more successful than anticipated. Within a year, over 200 villages had joined (See Figure 1)

d. (C) Parallel, though less significant than the self-defense aspect of the program, was the Strike Force element. At the same time that the USASF detachment was training the village defenders, they began to organize about 50 tribesmen into a paramilitary force to defend what would rapidly become a training center. In addition they could be used as a kind of mobile reserve for the village. These Strike Forces received more training than the members of the self defense program. The two elements of the program complemented one another, the former being large and static, the latter being small and mobile. The strategy evolved along the lines of the "oil spot"³ strategy discussed by LTC John J. McCUEN. The "oil spot" in this case was called an Area Development Center, each village which joined the program being part of one self-sustained defense system. As the program expanded, it was hoped that each ADC would eventually grow until it reached the boundary of other ADCs, thus securing whole areas and populations. The strategy worked so well that CSD requested additional A teams for Darlac province and planned to apply the strategy to other tribal groups in Vietnam. The Vietnamese Government was very gratified by the success of the program in which VNSF personnel played an increasingly important role. Additional sites were selected by CSD, and later MACV, with GVN approval, and the pattern begun at BOUN ENAO was duplicated in many areas throughout Vietnam.

2 Taped interview, MSG L.R. FISHER, dated 18 Dec 70.

3 The Art of Revolutionary War, by LTC John J. McCUEN, Stockpole Books, 1966.

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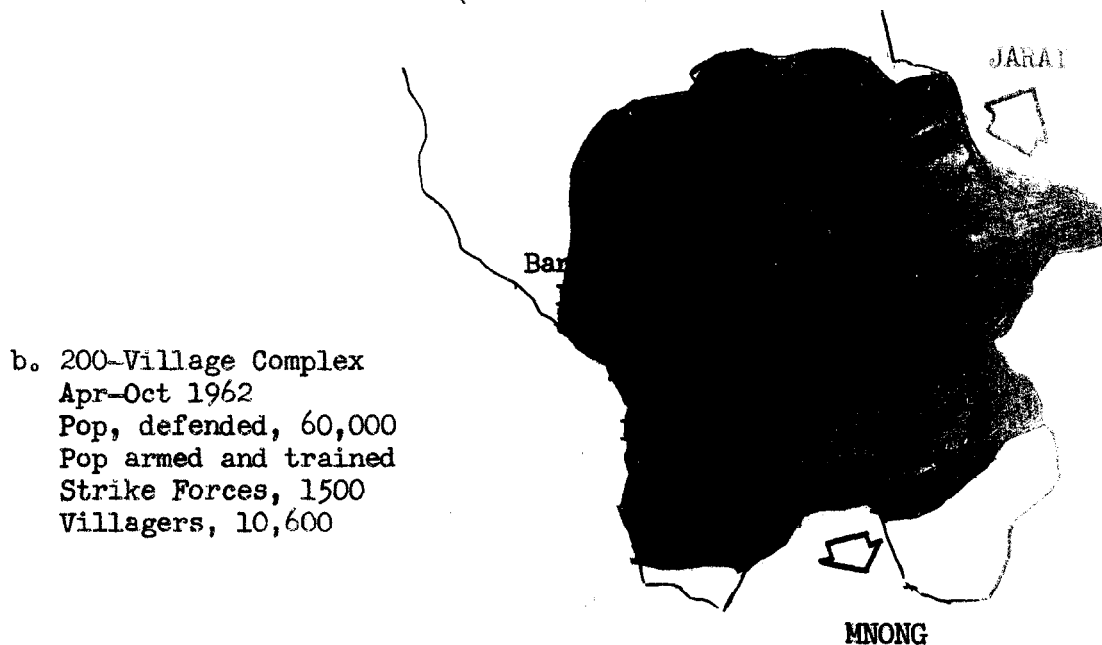
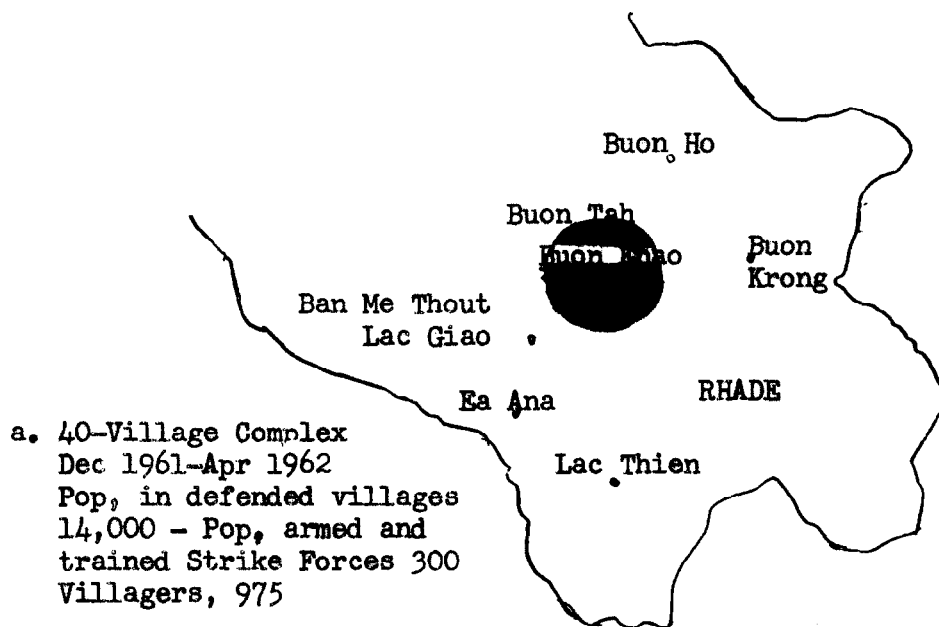


Fig 1 - Buon Enao Expansion
Province of Darlac; total population 140,000
Rhade population 70,000

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e. (C) "The general mission of an ADC, (referred to also as a CIDG camp) was to (a) establish a base camp for training Strike Force and Village Defenders; (b) conduct an Area Development Program to bring the local populace under GVN influence; (c) employ paramilitary forces in combat operations to reinforce organized hamlets, carry out interdiction activities, and conduct joint operations with ARVN units when such operations furthered the CIDG effort; (d) conduct PSYOPs to develop popular support for the GVN; (e) establish an area intelligence system, including, but not limited, to reconnaissance patrols, observation posts and agent informant networks; (f) conduct a CA program; and (g) where appropriate, establish a border screen in sectors along the RVN international border. During the development phase, all reasonable means were to be taken to improve the economic status of the local population by purchasing materials and hiring local labor for the construction and operation of the camp."⁴

f. (C) In retrospect, certain similarities can be discerned between the Area Development Centers and Strategic Hamlets. In fact, some sources consider the former as part of the latter. "The CIDG program was conceived as an integral part of the Strategic Hamlet Program."⁵ However, while the ADC part of the CIDG program centered itself around the village, the SHP centered itself around hamlets. This fractionalization of the lowest body-politic in Vietnam, (the village), contributed to the failure of the SHP. Additionally, the CIDG program included organic reserves, (the Strike Forces), which were vital to the defense of isolated villages. The Strategic Hamlets had to rely on a District Chief or ARVN unit commander to intervene, should a hamlet be attacked. Often, such reinforcement was beyond the capabilities of the limited forces available.

4. Training Civilian Irregulars

a. (S) Contemporary with the initiation of the BUON ENAO project was the beginning of USASF participation in a variety of paramilitary training programs for minority groups. Like the BUON ENAO project, the paramilitary training programs were undertaken at the direction of GVN and CSD.

b. (S) In December 1961 the second half of Det A-35 (the other half was at BUON ENAO) arrived at the HOA Cam Training Center in Da Nang. They inaugurated a basic training program together with several specialized programs. The following descriptions of irregular programs were extracted from RAC-T-477.

Fighting Fathers. In some areas resistance to insurgent activity centered on Catholic parish priests who were able to command the confidence and support of significant numbers of people. Some of these priests, who came to be known as "Fighting Fathers", were permitted to develop paramilitary forces and in February 1962 CSD began to provide weapons and ammunition to some of them. One of the most notable of these priests was Father Nguyen Lac Hoa to whom President Diem, as early as 1960, had given the responsibility of clearing a special district in An Xuyen Province. By September 1962 a total of 1516 persons including women and old men had been trained and armed as CIDG forces in Father Hoa's district, Hai Yen.

⁴ RAC T-477, pg. 37

⁵ SORO, pg. 4

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Catholic Youth. The Catholic Youth Program, initiated early in December 1961 at the request of President Diem, included groups originally organized by pastors of various parishes in the delta. The program with which CSD was asked to assist in February 1962 eventually included people of all ages and faiths. By September 1962 more than 2000 weapons had been provided by CSD to parishes in all provinces and Catholic Youth strength had reached 2675.

Trailwatchers. The inability of ARVN units to conduct continuous operations along the border areas and the presence of Montagnard tribes within the border regions of both Cambodia and Laos led CSD to initiate the Trailwatcher Program in June 1962. The mission of these Trailwatchers, later designated Border Surveillance units was to identify and report Viet Cong movements and to capture or destroy small Viet Cong units. Recruits were organized as company-sized units and trained for 8 weeks at Da Nang and certain ADCs.

Mountain Commandos. The Mountain Commando Political Action Paramilitary Program, later designated the Mountain Scout Program, was initiated in November 1961. Teams of 15 to 18 men were recruited in their respective home areas by province and district chiefs and were trained at the CSD Hoa Cam Training Center and later at Plei Yt. These teams were deployed in remote mountain and jungle areas on long-range hunter-killer/CA types of missions to provide a GVN presence in these areas and to function as an intelligence asset for district and provincial military and civil authorities.

CA Cadres. CSD provided limited paramilitary training and partial subsidy for CA cadres trained at Saigon, Da Nang, or at province level. These groups had a threefold mission: (a) to instruct the rural population in ways to improve their economic status (b) serve as GVN propaganda agents, and (c) assist in the development of the Strategic Hamlet Program.

Force Populaire and Republican Youth. These organizations provided political-action and paramilitary cadres in central and northern Vietnam for local training in self-defense at village level and a mechanism for the political indoctrination of Vietnamese youth. CSD provided paramilitary training and support for selected cadres from these organizations."⁶

c. (S) The dramatic success of the ADC served to dwarf the role played by the training detachments and paramilitary groups. Though training centers played continuing roles in one form or another, the real thrust of USASF efforts was in the direction of the ADC program. Thus in 1963 the term CIDG came to refer specifically to the village defenders and strike forces who comprised the ADCs.

5. Switchback Nov 62 - July 63

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6 RAC T-477, pp. 36-37

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a. (S) The success of the BUON ENAO project prompted CSD to request additional USASF detachments. An argument ensued between CSD and DOD concerning responsibility for the expanding project. On 23 July 1962 the Secretary of Defense decided in favor of DOD and ordered the transfer to the CIDG program from CSD to USMACV under the code-name SWITCHBACK.

b. (S) In September 1962 additional USASF personnel deployed to Vietnam with a skeleton C detachment. A provisional headquarters was activated to command and control subordinate USASF detachments. COL George MORTON became the commander of that headquarters. COL MORTON chose NHA TRANG as the location for the Special Forces Operating Base (SFOB). By the end of November 1962 there were 1 C, 3 B, and 26 A detachments in Vietnam operating under COL Morton's leadership.

c. (S) The transition from CSD to USMACV consumed 8 months, throughout which period the CIDG program continued to grow and expand. The most difficult aspect of the Switchback operation entailed the funding of the CIDG program. Troublesome too were the increasing logistical requirements generated by the dramatic growth of the CIDG program. However the transition generally went smoothly as evidenced by the report of a Department of the Army special warfare field visit to Vietnam and Okinawa 13-30 Jan 63.

"The team was favorably impressed by the highly professional, enthusiastic and cooperative manner in which the Special Forces Command, Vietnam and (CSD) Saigon are carrying out the operation (Switchback). Marked progress is evident in terms of new area development centers, number of Montagnard strike forces and village defenders trained, and systematic assumption of operational control by the Special Forces Command".⁷ Discussing the CIDG program's impact on the course of the war the report made the following observations: "Based on its observations, the team is persuaded that the CIDG program holds the key to attainment of the ultimate goal of a free, stable and secure Vietnam. In no other way does it appear possible to win support of the tribal groups, strangle Viet Cong remote area redoubts, and provide a reasonable basis for border control".⁸

d. (S) CSD disengaged from the CIDG program in July 1963. Thus USMACV inherited control over the successful on-going CIDG program. (See figure 2)

6. Changes to Mission and Subordination.

a. (S) Following the subordination of USASF and USMACV it was, perhaps, inevitable that USMACV strive to conventionalize and regulate the USASF-advised CIDG program. In May 1964 operational control of USASF A and B detachments in Vietnam was transferred to the American Senior Advisor in each Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ). In this manner it was hoped to make the CIDG program a working part

7 Letter, DA Office of the Chief of Staff, Subj: Special Warfare Field Visit to Vietnam & Okinawa 13-30 Jan 63, dated 30 Jan 63, pg 3

8 Ibid page 3

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USASF Deployment, 1 Jun 63

* 37 A detachments - 25 ADGs
5 $\frac{1}{2}$ ADC/Border Surveillance
5 $\frac{1}{2}$ ADC/Mountain Commando
1 Abn/Ranger Tng Center

+ 4 B detachments - Control

⊙ USASF HQ

XXX Corps Boundaries

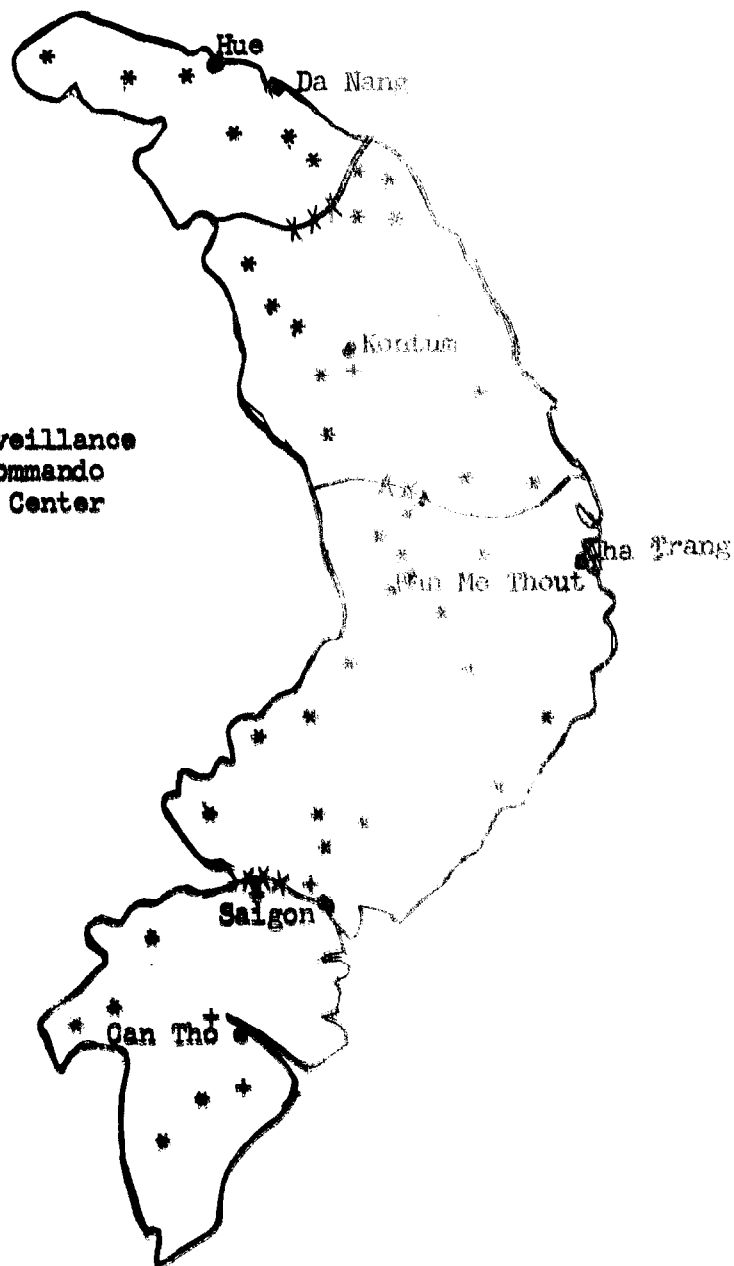


Figure 2

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of the countrywide Pacification Program. With the operational emphasis on the A and B detachments vested with the CTZ Senior advisor the mission of the Headquarters came to center around rendering personnel, administrative and logistical support to the operational detachments.

b. (S) During the transition period of Switchback, a border surveillance force was constructed along the Laotian and Cambodian borders. Initially, the mission of the ADCs, in those areas, was to collect intelligence on cross-border infiltration of VC troops and supplies. It was a relatively simple and natural extension of the mission from monitoring the infiltration to interfering with it. From 1965 through 1970 special emphasis was placed on utilizing the ADC personnel in a border surveillance/interdiction role. This development was unavoidable at the time for two reasons; 1. The war in the RVN was escalating as VC and then NVA infiltration increased and 2. the high priority of the ADCs were often located in remote areas which were used by the enemy for infiltration/supply corridors. The border surveillance (BS) mission eventually tended to supplant the area development mission, but rather than being a point of fact, however, border surveillance rapidly became the primary mission with the area development taking a secondary role.

c. (C) The shift in priorities directed by USMACV, from area development to border surveillance signalled the definite beginning of the end of the CIDG program. The commitment to the border surveillance mission required serious departures from Special Forces doctrine and methods of operation. The commitment came to rely on financial remuneration rather than dependence on the local village against the VC. Operations gradually became more of a military nature. The task took up more time and required well trained and disciplined personnel. In return, led to their increased professionalization. In some cases, the ADCs and Surveillance Camps were built in uninhabited areas, irregularly scheduled for pay, and transported along with their families to the surveillance mission. The Surveillance mission, then, became an almost purely military operation.

d. (C) In early 1965 there were very few MACV subsector advisory teams operating in RVN. Those teams which were operating (by the end of 1964 had produced very gratifying results and were expanded in the program. MACV studied the feasibility, in 1964, of assigning a second, though co-equal, mission as subsector and sector advisory teams. A successful test of the concept, MACV assigned the co-equal advisory role to the detachments located near district capitols. Several B detachments were assigned the co-equal sector advisory role. There were even instances where the detachments assigned the subsector advisory role without the corresponding sector advisory role. By October 1965, five B and 38 A detachments had co-equal advisory missions. The detachments assigned these missions peaked in the first quarter of 1966 (38 A detachments) and thereafter declined. On the whole the program was a success.

e. (C) As MACV advisor strength increased the number of detachments committed to the co-equal advisory decreased. However the number of detachments assigned these missions peaked in the first quarter of 1966 and the phasedown.

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IV THE GROWTH YEARS 1965 - 1968

1. The 5th SF Gp (Abn) deploys

a. (C) Even while the CIDG program was expanding and playing an increasingly important role plans were being made by USMACV to completely phase-out the program by 31 December 1965.

b. (C) Nonetheless, USARPAC ordered the redesignation of USASF in Vietnam to 5th Special Forces Group (Abn) on 1 Oct 1964. On the same date, COL John H. SPEARS assumed command of the unit. A phase-in period lasting through March 1965 was anticipated by USARPAC.

c. (U) The deployment of the 5th SF Gp (Abn) from Fort Bragg changed the complexion of much of the USASF advisory effort. While previous detachments deployed to Vietnam, on a TDY basis, for six months, the establishment of a regular TOE Group changed assignments to PCS for full year tours. This change was greeted with a lack of enthusiasm on the part of many Special Forces soldiers. The deployment was, perhaps, the final step towards conventionalization of USASF in Vietnam, complete with various headquarters, individual replacements and a proliferation of paper production.

d. (C) The personnel strength of the Group increased rapidly from 951 officers and men on 1 Oct 1964 to 1227 on 31 December 1964. Following the visit of the Secretary of Defense to Vietnam in July 1965, the 5th Group was allowed to increase its strength by 24 additional A detachments. Thus by the end of 1965 personnel strength stood at 1828. By 1967 personnel strength exceeded 3,000. This continuing growth spotlighted the increased importance of the USASF advised CIDG program.

2. Origins of Mike Forces and Special Projects 1964 - 1967

a. (S) Beginning in May 1964 with Project Leaping Lena, later renamed Project Delta, there began to develop special - purpose projects. These projects were, for the most part, outgrowths of the earlier strike force concept but their functions were much more specialized and therefore more military. Project Delta employed combined reconnaissance teams with an ARVN Airborne Ranger Battalion serving as a reaction/exploitation force. By 1967 the project included 16 reconnaissance teams each having four VNSF and two USASF, eight roadrunner teams and a six company reaction force.

b. (S) In mid 1965 COMUSMACV approved 5th SF Gp requests that a battalion of Mike (Mobile-Strike) Force be authorized for each O detachment with one for strategic reserve at NHA TRANG. These MIKE FORCES provided the O detachment commander with Corps-wide reinforcement, reaction and reconnaissance capabilities. The NHA TRANG MIKE FORCE (B55, later 5th Mobile Strike Force Command) was under the Group Commander's control. It grew from Battalion to Brigade strength in three years and saw action in all four OTZs.

c. (S) Towards the end of 1966 Mobile Guerilla Forces (MGF) were organized under each of the line companies. Operational employment of these forces required

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that they operate in enemy-controlled areas for periods lasting over a month. The organization at each company level consisted of an A detachment, a 150-man company, and a combat reconnaissance platoon (CRP). Within a year, however, operational employment of the mobile strike forces (MSF) tended to fuse, resulting in both MGF and MSF operations being termed MIKE FORCE Operations.

d. (S) It was also in 1966 that projects Omega and Sigma were organized, largely on the same lines and for the same purposes, as Project Delta. However operational control over project Omega was exercised by the Commanding General I Field Force Vietnam (IFFV). Operational control of project Sigma was held by the Commanding General of II Field Force Vietnam (IIFV).

e. (S) The development and use of the various MIKE FORCES signalled another step in the professionalization of the CIDG program. In order to draw and retain suitable indigenous personnel in the program, considerable pay and benefit incentives were used. The MIKE FORCES were very effective when employed in the roles for which they were trained, i.e. reconnaissance and rapid reaction. Unfortunately when MIKE FORCES were attached to US or ARVN units, they were sometimes used as conventional infantry over extended periods of time. This put considerable strain on the MIKE FORCES and occasionally resulted in criticism from US conventional unit commanders. Though efforts were made to educate US commanders about the capabilities and limitations of the MIKE FORCES, misuse remained a continuing problem.

3. Support of American Conventional Unit Deployment 1965 - 69

a. (U) The period of political/military instability which followed the overthrow of the DIEM government in November 1964 tempted the NLF to attempt a quick military solution to the Vietnamese conflict. Their rapid and dramatic increase in infiltration and adoption of an offensive posture resulted in a rapid American troop commitment. The conventional units deploying to Vietnam had little if any knowledge of the operational environment in Vietnam. The countrywide dispersion of CIDG camps together with the multitude of indigenous intelligence sources available to USASF made the CIDG program vital to the performance of conventional military operations. The conventional units came rapidly to depend on CIDG assets for a variety of services including: Local reconnaissance, flank security, intelligence reports, bomb damage assessments (BDA), guides, and interpreters. Similarly the buildup brought certain advantages to the CIDG program including increased reaction capability to CIDG contacts, increased fire-support from US conventional air and ground assets, increased helicopter support for CIDG airmobile operations and logistical support, and increased engineer and ordnance support.

b. (S) From 1965 through 1970 many of the more significant Allied field successes originated from CIDG contacts or intelligence reports. The arrival of more and more NVA units together with the impracticality of sealing Vietnam's border created a situation in which the CIDG were too weak to combat large, heavily armed NVA units and too small to effectively prevent the infiltration of supplies and personnel. The prominence then of the intelligence function was born mainly out of the necessity though the CIDG program was uniquely suited to the effort.

c. (S) To increase the quality and quantity of intelligence production, the 5th Group, starting in 1966 augmented the headquarters with collection, counter-

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intelligence photo interpretation, order of battle, interrogation, radio research, and analyst personnel. Personnel with these skills were attached down to the B detachment level.

d. (S) With the added emphasis and augmentation USASF was able to satisfy the increasing demands of conventional units for intelligence. And it was estimated that by 1967 USASF was producing over 40% of all MACV ground combat intelligence.

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V PHASEDOWN 1969 - 1970

1. Vietnamization

a. (U) As mentioned earlier, plans for the termination of the CIDG program had been considered as early as 1964. The increased tempo of the war did not provide an opportunity for the regular Armed Forces of Vietnam to assume the Border Surveillance role until 1970. By 1969 it was apparent to JGS and MACV that the quality of the ARVN had increased to the level of competence necessary to assume the additional mission of border surveillance/interdiction.

b. (S) Although CIDG camps regularly converted to Regional Force status or closed down when an area became pacified, the phasedown directed in the beginning of 1970 envisioned the discontinuance of the entire CIDG program. A combined JGS-MACV planning committee was convened on 20 March 1970 for the purpose of effecting a smooth and orderly termination of the CIDG program. The committee recommended that all remaining CIDG camps be converted to ARVN between the months of August and December 1970. A border control system using ARVN Ranger Battalions was decided upon as the appropriate successor to the CIDG program. JGS-MACV directed that VNSF assist the Rangers in a recruiting drive aimed at converting the outgoing CIDG assets into Ranger assets. Towards that end the VNSF participated in a Motivation and Indoctrination (M&I) program which explained the benefits of the conversion to the CIDG personnel. Figures of CIDG volunteering to convert varied from camp to camp but the majority chose to convert to Rangers. This is tangible proof that the Montagnard and other ethnic minorities who participated in the CIDG program had helped to bridge the gap of cultural alienation that only a few short years before had been prevalent.

c. (C) The 5th Special Forces Group participation in and, in fact, the CIDG program itself ended 31 December 1970. The program had been in many ways a chronicle of the larger war. Developing in response to the needs of ARVN as well as FVMAF, the USASF advised program displayed an organizational flexibility and a competence in the field that was rare in the ranks of modern warfare. That the CIDG program could be discontinued at all illustrates the maturity and confidence of the GVN in its regular armed forces; a maturity that the 5th SF Gp (Abn) helped, in its way, to nurture.

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